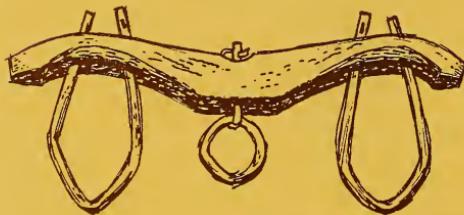


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And his name is Abraham
Lincoln - a homily

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*And His Name is
Abraham Lincoln -- A Homily*

By
EMANUEL HERTZ

*Delivered at the
Temple of Congregation B'Nai Jeshurun
February 10, 1929*



1809 ABRAHAM LINCOLN 1909

AND HIS NAME IS ABRAHAM LINCOLN— A HOMILY.

By
EMANUEL HERTZ

(Delivered at the Temple of Congregation B'Nai Jeshurun
on February 10, 1929.)

WHEN human slavery was an established institution—approved by the best men—when the many labored for the few, when royalty seemed entrenched in all its sordid phases throughout the world—when religious persecution was at its height—the gateway to a new continent is discovered. The messenger of Providence for this task knew but little of the magnitude of his deed. That remained a theme for Epic and for Saga.

The intrepid navigator sought his reward—which never came. Did great benefactor of mankind ever receive his reward? Ostracism, burning, stoning, the gibbet, yes—but reward and appreciation are at best post mortem phenomena. He sought to bring a host of the primitive children of the new world, and sell them into slavery in the marts of the old world—and failed. How tragic his end, how shortsighted and how obscured became the vision of that great soul—inwardly consumed and utterly burnt out by the one life long consuming passion, his great discovery of the Americas.

The next phase sees the influx of the adventurer in South America, in Mexico—who with fire and sword and torture inaugurates the conquest of the Continent; a terror such as we of today do not appreciate, rules in the land. Hecatombs

of human sacrifice, followed by the practical annihilation of an entire race—the enslavement of millions beneath the heel of the cruel conqueror follows—a slavery so inexorable and permanent and thorough that its consequences keep millions in darkness and serfdom today.

Then among the rush of the hordes of adventurers who nearly overran the continent, came the infiltration of the victims of religious persecution from the northern lands of benighted Europe, seeking a new home—with freedom of worship—freedom of action—with a voice in their government.

Those good old times so often chanted and sung in poetry and song, were not altogether so good and above reproach. The torture chamber of the Inquisition—promptly planted in many quarters of this continent, the burning of witches, the strangling and hanging and torturing and banishing of dissenters, were but the order of the day. And in consequence of these good old times some of England's best sons came and settled the eastern coast—and began to inaugurate a new era.

Then came the Huguenots from the very heart of France after the horror of St. Bartholomew's night—the followers of Coligney, and a not altogether friendly rivalry began between them and those of Cromwell's Ironsides who survived after the Restoration—and scores were finally settled on the plains of Abraham with the resulting loss of two precious lives—those of Montcalm and Wolfe.

Prosperity in the new land brought slavery in its train. Africa, the continent of sleep and of stupor supplied the slave marts of the world with its ignorant and half-witted offspring who preferred the horrors of slavery to the stagnation of Africa. The darkest chapters of modern times are to be found in the never-ending Hegira from the slave kennels of Africa to the slave ports of an entire world. Humanity rarely, if ever, sank to so low a level.

America's contact came with the slave-laden boat which landed and disembarked its cargo of slaves at Jamestown, in 1619. The evil seed was then planted. The whirlwind came in 1861. The slave power in America was born on that fatal day. For over two centuries the cancer grew and spread, appearing and disappearing in different parts of the body of the young giant of the west; at first in the Colonies, then in the Confederation, then in all but one of the Thirteen States, and finally in the newly formed United States. By strange strokes of fortune this young government successfully fought the Indian and drove him from its borders, confined him to certain areas and finally absorbed and amalgamated with the red man—simultaneously disinheriting him—a not altogether glorious chapter in our history. Even more strange is the victory over the greatest world power then coming to the front. The power that soon after destroyed Napoleon—the mistress of the seas, and ultimately of the world, a country with dominions so far flung that the sun never sets within them—suffered defeat at the hands of this hardy new nation. Strong is the man who governs himself—a well known preachment from the Ethics of the Fathers—stronger is the nation that governs itself and is not governed by prince or potentate. Even that did our forefathers then establish — they founded a government where the people rule—where the people are able to rule if they so desire, and on epoch-making occasions, at least, the people do rule. And this phenomenon on a huge scale our forefathers wrought.

But the two hundred year old cancer remains. Slavery was side-stepped on that great occasion when by our Constitution we became one and indivisible. Eyes had they and saw not—or were they tired after the exhausting struggle to bring about the marvelous deliverance from England—and could not undertake the achievement of this other greater problem—the liberation of mankind? The new Republic grew and expanded and waxed great and wealthy—and with it the

great destroyer, the great disease at its vitals. The fathers had hoped it would die a natural death—it was doomed to ultimate extinction. Had they not provided against further importation after 1807? It could not last for all time, they thought, if the source of supply was thus destroyed. Some liberated their slaves by way of example to others. The father of his country liberated his, and then the author of the famous Declaration "trembled for his country when he thought that God was just," and liberated his slaves, but all to no avail.

The cotton gin is invented by Eli Whitney—and Cotton is King. Who can gainsay that slogan? England takes the greater part of it and helps to create the aristocracy of wealth in the Southland. The leaders, the statesmen, the preachers, the teachers, all bow to the new king. The slave power gradually reaches every vital center in the land and assumes the championship of States' Rights. The money arteries of the North depend upon cotton. The factories in England are maintained by cotton. The spokesmen in the United States Congress speak for King Cotton, and assault the spokesman of freedom. Even the Supreme Court of the United States is gradually so constituted as to speak for the claims of King Cotton, and all this time the entire continent is rocked to its very foundation as the final chapters of the slave power in America are being written.

Oh, what a horrible tale it is that is told throughout these centuries of slavery; what a history of cruelty, of degredation, of hate, of horror, of barbarism and of bestiality is enacted. "If all the seas were ink, all the skies parchment, all reeds pens and all men scribes," the story of that inhuman institution, with its millions upon millions of victims, could not be adequately written and described.

And then God said: "Let there be light."

And there was light—at first blinding—to which the eyes of the slavocracy could not become accustomed—could not and would not endure.

And then God's appointed messenger—that Isaiah of the Nineteenth Century, spoke:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe that this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.”

A false, sedetious, treasonable utterance—shouted the chorus of compromisers, of pacifists, of apologists of the prevailing order—the Supreme Court had spoken that the slave had no right which the white man was bound to respect; that, therefore, is final. But what about the Declaration of Independence? Were not all men created equal? Have you forgotten 1776 when it was promulgated to a hostile world? It is simply unthinkable that even that door is closed to the slave now. Is it an everlasting doom? Is there no day of liberation for the race—no matter how remote? This inspired advocate of freedom pleads agonizingly with his blind and misguided countrymen. He reminds them that:

“ * * * In those days our Declaration of Independence was held sacred by all, and thought to include all; but now, to aid in making the bondage of the negro universal and eternal, it is assailed and sneered at and construed, and hawked at and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him.

Mammon is after him, ambition follows, philosophy follows, and the theology of the day is fast joining the cry. They have him in his prison-house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him; and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key—the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places; and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is."

The silhouette of this great man was now seen against the western sky. A primitive elemental power was visible in his eyes. His voice was heard throughout the land and in every part thereof. He was born in the South, had seen the hateful institution and became the saddest of men. He loved his country with a superhuman love. It must endure, but it could not endure with slavery entrenched in all its battlements. He had been in Congress and felt the strange hold of the monster in every department of the government. He had seen his country driven into an unjust war in order that slavery might entrench itself still more—Texas came into the Union and additional territory for five new slave states. He was driven from public life, he brooded, he labored, he attempted to solve the riddle which had worsted the fathers and the founders and their successors for seventy years. What was it that destroyed Webster, defeated Clay, drove Benton from public life? Slavery, always slavery, that golden calf of American politics. He wandered over the prairies for thirty years—thinking, studying, arguing, acquiring knowledge and understanding and wisdom and power and strength. The slave power grew and expanded to colossal proportions. It now

owned the South outright and had neutralized the Presidency by a Cabinet dominated by the South, and had a majority in the Supreme Court, and the money power and the markets of the world were ever at its call. The time was ripe, the issue clear, the lines were drawn. There he stands—a man for the ages—and around him beat the angry waves of passion, of mammon, of sectionalism—the first great skirmish, the great debate; had been fought and won by slavery.

But it was a Pyrrhic victory; it had been fought in the open, in the presence of a hundred thousand Americans, and was read in print by all who hungered for information on this question which meant life or death to free government—the government of Washington and of Jefferson. Douglas never recovered after this fight—either politically or physically. It lost him the South and for the first time in its sordid history the slave power became divided. It united the opposition, and brought the Republican Party upon the scene: and the great leader appeared—the appointed of God—for the last great battle at Armageddon, where slavery was to perish.

Then came the bloodiest of wars upon the heels of the first victory for freedom at the polls. A ghastly fear spread over the entire land. Shall this last experiment of government of the people fail? The best minds of the European continent heralded the impending advent of that—to them—glorious day. The slave power had their good will. Mediation, intervention, a world war against the friends of freedom was imminent. For was not Cotton, King?

But the deliverer was at the helm. True, the ship of state was caught in the tornado of Civil War, but the hand at the wheel was steady—guided by a higher power. He was more than their equal in every emergency. This farmer-lawyer-politician was a diplomat of a high order. He knew how to checkmate the ablest diplomats of his day. The schemes of

Palmerston and Gladstone and Napoleon III crumbled—there was no intervention. He knew more about munitions than any other man on either side of the conflict—and through his agents controlled the whole world market and gathered in all the munitions on the European continent. He was a financier, indeed, to pay his way through—these four eventful and expensive years. He was a political leader of rare insight. He kept the strategic States in line by advising and helping his friends to attain the key positions. He, a layman, had time to study the war map and shed light and leading on a war front of thousands of miles, and established a hitherto unheard of blockade of three thousand miles of Confederate coast. He strangled the Confederacy after he had first bisected it. He saw it all. He understood it all. He had a ready answer for him who in his zeal travelled too fast and blamed the great commoner for being too slow. He did everything in God's appointed time. He succeeded in ridding himself of all who hampered him in his daily tasks and replaced them by willing, loyal, intelligent agents who carried out his orders and commissions. He knew the people were with him—for in spite of the clamor which for a time made him doubt the people, in spite of misguided friend and outspoken opponent—his people spoke in amazing unanimity and continued him at the hazardous post by an overwhelming re-election—to the utter amazement and undoing of Copperhead and Southern politician alike.

And now the task was done. The Confederacy had crumbled, the leaders of the aristocratic South are ready to join hands with the simple spokesmen of the people, to the end that the war-inflicted wounds be healed, their common country restored, the States re-admitted to the Union, the government of the United States re-established. "We must live together and forget the past," he argued. The bondmen had come into their own. They had to get the proper start.

They would have to live and work, side by side, with their former masters. The great aftermath of the gigantic rebellion was to be properly met and dealt with, and an equitable reconstruction inaugurated. "Let us have peace," was a devout prayer—but the bitter-enders were still to be reckoned with.

The entire world began to see and wonder at the momentous achievement of this great American. He had no forerunners, he has no successors. His great contemporaries shrink and dwindle by comparison—and it was really an era of great men. He was, by universal consent, the first American, and was responsible for more achievements, more epoch-making accomplishments in these four years than had ever been accomplished by another in any other preceding four years in the history of the world. Then—seven days after Appomattox—and he was no more. God took him! He was needed in the celestial councils above where were his kindred spirits of the ages: Hamurabi and Moses, Socrates and Solomon, Plato and Aristotle, Columbus, Galileo and Luther. He was no more. He stood before the celestial throne of his Maker.

And millions mourned, and mourning took him home to Springfield—over the longest funeral procession ever witnessed on the continent—to Springfield where he had lived, where he had labored, where he had thought, where he had prepared for the great adventure—his great adventure in Washington, where he saved the government of the people which Washington and Jefferson had called into being: every home gazes upon those benign features of this gentle spirit—whose life story has become a benediction and an inspiration.—

And his name is ABRAHAM LINCOLN.





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